



INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FIRE CHIEFS

Providing leadership for the fire and emergency services since 1873

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December 10, 2004

Speaker J. Dennis Hastert
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Hastert:

In the 109th Congress, the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC) would like to see a permanent, standing Homeland Security Committee with full oversight, authorization, and legislative jurisdiction over the Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

Robust congressional oversight of any federal department maintains the important system of checks and balances that keeps the federal government accountable to its constituents. DHS has a special role in that it was created to better secure and protect the homeland. Despite that fact, congressional oversight is spread among a large and overlapping web of committees and subcommittees. We believe that to exert the most efficient and effective oversight of DHS, the House of Representatives should have one committee to which the department reports.

America's fire service has a direct stake in this issue. For centuries, we have been the principal protector of life and property when disasters, large and small, occur. America's fire service protects the critical infrastructure and is, in fact, part of it. DHS oversees the grant funding mechanisms that are so important to first responder preparedness. It also implements policy on major homeland security issues such as interoperable communications, incident command, mutual aid, and disaster management planning. Many programs at DHS have a direct bearing on America's fire service, thus the urgent requirement that Congress be organized for efficient oversight of this new department.

Established in 1873, the IAFC is a network of more than 12,000 chief fire and emergency officers. Our members are the world's leading experts in structural and wildland firefighting, emergency medical services, hazardous materials incident response (including chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear events), technical rescues (including swiftwater, high angle and confined-space rescues and auto extrication), natural disasters, and public safety legislation.

Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to receiving your reply.

Sincerely,

Chief Robert A. DiPoli
President

Cc: Chairman Christopher Cox, House Select Committee on Homeland Security
Chairman David Dreier, House Rules Committee